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According to Hyman's theory concerning the value systems of different classes, Negroes and whites are not likely to place similar emphasis upon economic success: other writers have indicated that the racial identity of the Negro limits his aspirations for job placement and opportunity. This 1966 study sttempts to measure the job opportunity perceptions of rural youth and the differences due to racial origin. Conclusions of the study indicate that Negro youth do generally perceive less occupational opportunity than white youth, but when viewed collectively they do not have lower occupational expectations than whites. no significant difference was shown, however, between the perception of opportunity and the occupations either group expected to attain. (DK)

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PERCEPTION OF OPPORTUNITY AND OCCUPATIONAL EXPECTATION:

A RACIAL COMPARISON OF RURAL YOUTH*

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Introduction

For the past two decades, occupational orientations of adolescents have been the focus of extensive research in the United States. Although many of the previous studies have suggested that perception of opportunity plays an important role in determining a person's expectation of future occupation, no study is known to have empirically tested this proposition. The objective of this study is to explore the relationship between perception of opportunity and occupational expectation held by Negro and white rural youth.[1]

Framework for Study

In an article concerning the value systems of different classes, Hyman states that lower class individuals have a system of values which involves increased awareness of lack of opportunity and that this produces less emphasis upon high success goals as compared with other youth.[2] According to Hyman, "The goals of all individuals are governed to some extent by the appraisal of reality. Since the poor are more aware of their lack of opportunity, presumably they would set their goals in the light of such beliefs."[3] Although Hyman confines his theory primarily to an analysis of social classes, he also indicates that Negroes and whites in the American society are not likely to place similar emphasis upon economic success.

In the Negroes' caste-like setting within the United States, a Negro child learns during the course of social maturation that he

has a racial identity which is judged to be inferior to that of the white majority. Cohen writes that "... a Negro's consciousness of his racial identity palls or casts a shadow over his hopes and ambitions which he has learned in common with almost all other American children, Negro and white."[4]

Following Hyman's theory it may be inferred that there is a positive relationship between a person's perception of opportunity and the level of occupation he expects to attain. It may further be assumed that Negroes, as a disadvantaged group in society, are likely to perceive less occupational opportunity than whites, and therefore, they would probably expect lower level occupational attainment than whites. This study is designed to test the following three hypotheses:

1. Negro youth have a greater awareness of limited occupational opportunity than white youth.
2. Negro youth have lower levels of occupational expectation than white youth.
3. A positive relationship exists between perception of opportunity and occupational expectations for both racial groupings.

Methods and Procedures

The data used in this study were obtained during the spring of 1966 from high school male sophomores in three East Central Texas counties which were all-rural and were not contiguous to a

metropolitan area. These counties were selected because they were characterized by high proportions of Negroes and low-income families as compared with Texas and the United States as a whole.

A scale consisting of twelve items was used to measure the perception of occupational opportunity. The students were asked the following question:

> How much effect do you think each of the following things will have in <u>keeping you from getting</u> the kind of job you desire?

This was immediately followed by statements involving a number of potential barriers, and these constitute the items of the scale which are given below:

1. Can't afford to go to technical school or college.
2. The schools I have gone to.
3. Lack of parents' interest.
4. Ability to borrow money.
5. My race.
6. Don't want to move.
7. Good jobs are getting too scarce in the U. S.
8. Lack of good job opportunities in or near my community.
9. No technical school or college nearby.
10. Don't know enough about the opportunities that exist.
11. Have to help support my family.
12. Not smart enough.

Each of these twelve items was rated on a four-point scale in the following manner:

Very much = 4

Much = 3

Some = 2

Not at all = 1

On the basis of this rating a total perception of opportunity score was calculated for each respondent.

It can be seen that some items contained in the scale are directly related to perception of occupational opportunity while others will indirectly influence the attainment of a job. This scale attempts to measure perception of occupational opportunity from several angles because occupational opportunity itself is believed to be dependent on a number of factors.

The instrument used to elicit the occupational expectations of the students was worded in the following manner:

What kind of job do you <u>really</u> expect most of your life?

The responses to the above question were coded according to a modified version of the Census scheme using eight occupational categories: <u>high professional</u>, <u>low professional</u>, <u>glamour</u>, <u>clerical and sales</u>, <u>skilled</u>, <u>operatives</u>, and <u>unskilled</u>.[5]

Findings

<u>Hypothesis 1</u>. <u>Negro youth have a greater awareness of limited occupational opportunity than white youth</u>.

The data in <u>Table 1</u> consistently demonstrate the support for the proposed hypothesis. Negroes had higher scores (perception of lower opportunity) than whites on 11 of 12 items, five of which demonstrated statistically significant differences. To help show more clearly the relative magnitude of racial differences, these

Table 1. A Comparison Between Negro and White Youth on Perception of Opportunity Items.

Items	Mean Score*		Difference	t	P
	Negro N=74	White N=148			
My Race	1.82	1.18	.64	5.80	< .01
Can't afford to go to technical school or college	2.24	1.83	.41	2.98	< .01
Have to help support my family	1.70	1.38	.32	2.82	< .01
Ability to borrow money	1.90	1.61	.29	2.29	< .05
Don't want to move	1.76	1.54	.22	1.76	< .05
Not smart enough	1.94	1.73	.21	1.58	< .10
Don't know enough about opportunity that exists	1.98	1.87	.11	0.89	NS
The schools I have gone to	1.81	1.72	.09	0.74	NS
No technical school or college nearby	1.68	1.60	.08	0.65	NS
Good jobs are getting too scarce in the United States	1.74	1.81	.07	0.56	NS
Lack of good job opportunity in or near my community	2.19	2.13	.06	0.43	NS
Lack of parents' interest	1.60	1.60	.00	0.00	NS
TOTAL	22.36	20.00			
No information	4	5			

*The range in scores was 1-4, 1 indicating highest perceived opportunity.

items were arranged in order of differences in mean scores. This shows that the most significant Negro-white difference occurred on the question of race. The next three items on which the two races were found to differ significantly were: "Can't affort to go to technical school and college," "Have to help support my family," and "Ability to borrow money." It can be seen that all the three items were related to economic opportunity.

The next item indicating significant racial difference was "Don't want to move." This finding was not surprising in view of the fact that the rate of the Negro migration from rural areas is higher than that of whites.

Of the last seven items that appear in Table 1, none were found to have statistically significant differences. This suggests a modification of the hypothesis proposed in this paper. It can be stated that, of various dimensions of occupational opportunity, Negro boys perceive less opportunity than white boys with regard to such factors as economic opportunity and racial status, while the two races do not differ greatly in perception of job opportunities, educational facilities, and family support.

Although the findings of this study clearly indicate that Negroes perceived less opportunity than whites, it should be noted that the mean item scores generally suggest that neither grouping considered the factors mentioned to be of much importance as impediments in attaining their desired jobs. This is significant in view

of the fact that these boys came from economically depressed areas. The young age of the respondents may be a factor explaining this optimistic outlook about opportunity.

Hypothesis 2. Negro youth have lower levels of occupational expectation than white youth.

The findings on occupational expectation show that approximately one-third of both Negro and white boys expected to attain professional jobs, Table 2. However, more Negroes than whites expected jobs in the glamour category. The differences between the two races are prominent at the middle and lower occupational categories. For example, compared to only 4 percent of Negroes, more than one-fifth of whites expected managerial jobs and a larger proportion of whites indicated expectation for skilled jobs. On the other hand, twice as many Negroes as whites expected semiskilled and unskilled jobs.

In order to determine more clearly the racial differences in occupational expectation levels, the eight original occupational categories were collapsed into three broader levels--high intermediate, and low.[6] This presents an intriguing picture--at the high as well as low levels of occupations the proportions of Negroes were greater than whites, while twice as many whites as Negroes expected jobs at the intermediate level. This clearly suggests that the levels of expectation of two races were different. However, based on our findings no conclusive statement can be made about the pertinent hypothesis.

Table 2. A Comparison Between Negro and White Youth On Occupational Expectations

Expectation	Negro N=96	White N=150
	-----Percent-------	
High Professional	6	6
Low Professional	26	25
Glamour	15	7
Managerial	4	22
Clerical and Sales	6	3
Skilled	14	22
Operatives	24	13
Unskilled	5	2
Total	100	100
No Information	2	3
$x^2 = 27.42$	D.F. = 7	P<.001

Table 3. A Comparison Between Negro and White Youth On Occupational Expectation Levels

Expectation Level	Negro N=96	White N=150	Difference
	------Percent------		
High	47	38	9
Intermediate	24	47	23
Low	29	15	14
Total	100	100	
No Information	2	3	
$x^2 = 16.11$	D.F. = 2		P<.001

Hypothesis 3. A positive relationship exists between perception of opportunity and occupational expectations for both racial groupings.

In Table 4 both Negro and white youth were classified under three broad categories according to total perception of opportunity score.[7] Of these three groups, the boys having scores between 12 and 20 perceived highest opportunity, while the group with the score range of 30-39 perceived least opportunity; the boys with the score range of 21-29 represented the intermediate group. It can be seen that although the expectation levels of white boys decreased slightly as they perceived less opportunity, the differences among the three groups were not substantial. Among Negroes the boys in the most optimistic category had higher occupational expectations than the other two groups; however, it was the intermediate group whose expectations were lowest. Thus, our data fail to adequately support the hypothesis.

Conclusions

On the basis of the findings of this study it can be concluded that Negro youth generally perceive less occupational opportunity than white youth; however, they do not have, when viewed collectively, lower occupational expectations than whites. For both races, no significant relationship was obtained between their perception of opportunity and occupations they expect to attain.

Table 4. Perception of Opportunity Levels By Expectation Levels For Each Race.

P. O. Score*	Occupational Expectation Levels					
	Negro[1]			White[2]		
Levels	High	Interm.	Low	High	Interm.	Low
	----------Percent----------					
12-20 (high)	62	25	13	40	49	11
Negro N=37 White N=88						
21-29 (interm.)	33	24	43	38	46	16
Negro N=45 White N=44						
30-39 (low)**	55	27	18	32	53	15
Negro N=11 White N=13						

[1] $x^2 = 10.15$, D.F. = 4, $P > .02 < .05$

[2] $x^2 = .91$, D.F. = 4, $P > .90 < .95$

*The range in scores was 12-48, 12 indicating highest perceived opportunity.

**Only one Negro boy scored 48, and the rest of the scores were below 40. The score 48 was included in the category 30-39.

The findings of this study give support to the contention of some sociologists who believe that high aspirations and expectations among Negroes should be seen as an intense drive toward success in search for enhanced self-esteem.[8] It has also been suggested that due to prevailing discrimination in other areas of occupation, Negroes are motivated toward professional jobs as a probable avenue offering mobility. This may help to explain the unexpected finding of this study that Negroes perceived less opportunity than whites, but did not generally have lower levels of occupational expectations.[9]

This study probably represents the first time that an effort was made to study the perception of job opportunity held by adolescents. Obviously, more research will be needed to determine the utility and validity of the scale used for this purpose. The finding that half of the items of the scale failed to demonstrate substantial differences between races, and that most items indicated very high opportunity, brings into question the utility of at least some of the items. The use of the total perception of opportunity score based on all the individuals item scores may have been an important factor contributing to a lack of positive relationship between perception of opportunity and occupational expectations. The items used in the Perception of Opportunity Scale will have to be tested on various populations before a final judgement can be made on the most desirable indicator of this phenomenon. Putting the

questions in a form of statements, as has been done by Short and his associate, might be useful in eliciting more discriminating measures of perception of opportunity.[10] Much future research is needed to determine and test alternative methods of measuring perception of opportunity.

Footnotes

[1] This paper evolved from my Masters' thesis entitled, "Occupational Status Orientations and Perception of Opportunity: A Racial Comparison of Rural Youth from Depressed Areas" (Department of Agricultural Economics and Sociology, Texas A&M University, 1968), and I wish to acknowledge my appreciation to Dr. William P. Kuvlesky under whose guidance the thesis was planned and written.

[2] Herbert H. Hyman, "The Value Systems of Different Classes: A Social Psychological Contribution to the Analysis of Stratification," in Reinhard Bendix and Seymour M. Lipset (eds.), Class, Status and Power: A Reader in Social Stratification (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1953), pp. 426-442.

[3] Ibid., p. 437.

[4] Yehudi Cohen (ed.), Social Structure and Personality: A Casebook (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1964), p. 46.

[5] The most important change introduced in the original Census scheme was the division of the professional category into high professional, low professional, and glamour. Occupations which required degrees beyond the B.S. or B.A. were classified as "high professional," while such professions as singer, band leader, sports, etc. were classified under a separate category called "glamour." The "low professional" constitutes a residual category which included all other professional and technical occupations.

[6] The first three occupational categories, that, high professional, low professional, and glamour, were combined to form the high level of occupational class. The intermediate level consists of managerial, clerical, and skilled jobs. The remaining two categories, operatives and unskilled, were combined to form the low level of occupational class. These three categories were considered to be an improvement upon more frequently used dichotomous occupational categories, white collar and blue collar, or professional and the other. William P. Kuvlesky and George W. Ohlendorf, Occupational Status Orientation of Negro Boys: A Rural-Urban Comparison. A paper read at the Rural Sociological Society Meetings, Miami Beach, Florida, August, 1966, pp. 21-22.

[7] For each respondent a total perception of opportunity score was calculated by taking the sum total of all the scores made on the individual items.

[8] Aaron Antonovsky and Melvin J. Lerner, "Occupational Aspirations of Lower Class Negro and White Youths," Social Problems, 7 (Fall, 1959), pp. 123-138.

[9] Ibid.

[10] James F. Short, Ramon Rivera, and Ray A. Tennyson, "Perceived Opportunity, Young Membership and Delinquency," American Sociological Review, 22 (April, 1957), pp. 56-67.